



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources



History: Forest Legacy Program in Washington State

THE FIRST TEN YEARS

In 1990, Congress created the Forest Legacy Program to protect environmentally important forestlands threatened by conversion to non-forest uses – mostly commercial or residential development. This national Forest Legacy Program pays for conservation easements and other land protection to retain forests, and assure both the traditional uses of private forestlands and the natural resource values embraced by the public are protected for future generations.

Lands acquired through the Forest Legacy Program include “working forests,” where forestland is managed to produce forest products, and traditional forest uses are nurtured and encouraged. Uses include commodity production and non-commodity values – such as healthy riparian (streamside) areas that protect the waters, wetlands, fish and wildlife, scenic, aesthetic, cultural, and recreation resources, and other ecological values.

The USDA Forest Service administers the Forest Legacy program. The Forest Legacy Program promotes the long-term integrity of forestlands using cooperative efforts of willing landowners, state lead agencies, and a state Forest Coordinating Committee. Through the program, the federal government funds up to 75 percent of the land acquisition costs, with the remaining 25 percent provided by the state or other conservation partners.

Forest Legacy in Washington State

Washington is one of the five original states to start the program in 1990. Former governor Booth Gardner designated the State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as Washington’s lead agency for managing the Forest Legacy Program. DNR established guidelines for the state program by describing Washington’s need for the program and outlining strategic goals. This Assessment of Need (AON) was completed in 1993.

Washington State Forest Legacy Program Major Goals in 1993 Assessment

- C Protect water quality
- C Provide present or future timber management opportunities
- C Provide habitat for native fish, wildlife or plants
- C Determine Forest Legacy Areas based on natural boundaries rather than artificial boundaries

From the beginning, Washington has worked to support the national and state program objectives. Forest Legacy financial resources are leveraged with partners (federal, state, local government, private corporations, non-profits, interest groups and foundations) to maximize conservation benefits. Partners have worked together to help consolidate forest landscapes to meet Legacy goals and the goals of all partners. The Mountains to Sound Greenway landscape in the Interstate-90 Corridor includes many successful Washington Forest Legacy projects.

Strong support by individuals in leadership roles has helped create successful efforts in the state. U.S. Senator Slade Gorton, and Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust President Jim Ellis have been instrumental in consolidating landscapes in important conservation areas in Washington State.

Since 1999 the program branched out from the Mountains to Sound Greenway to support the Foothills Forest Initiative, to protect forestlands where many are being developed into non-forest uses.

Availability of federal funding for the Forest Legacy Program has increased along with the number of states with active Forest Legacy Programs. However, the proportion of active states has also increased. Initially five states were participants; in 2002 the number grew to 37 states and is rising.

National Forest Legacy Program Budget History

Year	Millions of Dollars
1992	\$ 4.9
1993	9.9
1994	7.0
1995	6.7
1996	3.0
1997	2.0
1998	4.0
1999	7.0
2000	30.0
2001	60.0
2002	65.0
2003	85.0
2004	71.0

For Washington State, the strategy of focusing limited resources in specific “focus areas” and partnering with other organizations with similar goals has proved to be an effective way to protect forestlands and the associated uses.

Program Highlights

Legacy funding has been essential for maximizing benefits to create landscapes that protect water quality, forest resources, wildlife habitat, scenic and social values on lands that would otherwise revert to non-forest use. The success of the program is a function of the cooperative efforts between state, federal, county, city, private, and non-profit organizations that have collaborate on projects to protect and consolidate forest land.

See Washington State Forest Legacy Program Acquisitions on this website.

Since 2003, DNR has been in the process of amending its Assessment of Need (AON). The amendment is needed to address changes that have occurred since the program was created, and to help meet state and national goals for the program. The amended document should be completed by summer of 2004.

Washington’s current Forest Legacy Area restricts acquisitions to areas primarily zoned as Rural Residential in the eastern portions of King, Pierce and Snohomish Counties. Although this identifies some of the most threatened lands in Washington, it does not include the Forest Zone, where forestlands are being converted to non-forest uses at an alarming rate. These forest areas threatened by development in Washington State are being considered for potential inclusion in the program.

Conversion of land from traditional forest use to industrial and residential use is changing the character and quality of life in American communities nationwide. Dollars appropriated to the Forest Legacy Program permanently protect scenic, cultural, timber, fish, wildlife, recreation and riparian resources.